

Opening Remarks of
The Honorable Tom Feeney, Ranking Republican Member
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
Markup of “Federal Aviation Research and Development Reauthorization Act of 2007”
June 14, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This morning’s markup of legislation reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration’s research and development programs is an important first step to redirect, reinforce, and improve agency efforts to maintain the highest possible levels of safety, efficiency, and capacity in our national airspace system. I support this legislation and urge all Members to support it as well.

The FAA is a unique federal enterprise. 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it operates a complex nationwide network of communications, navigation and surveillance systems upon which our civil, military and general aviation aircraft are completely dependent. The architecture of this system dates back 50 years. It is simply incapable, as currently designed, of handling large increases in traffic.

But having said that, a huge – and increasing – portion of our economy is directly reliant on FAA’s ability to manage the air traffic control system at the highest levels of performance. More and more commerce is utilizing the airways in one form or another to meet consumer demand. The result of these trends is not surprising: congestion and increasing frequency of flight delays, clear signs of stress on a system that is close to saturation.

The bill before us takes several important steps to address this issue. First, it reauthorizes R&D programs and projects requested by the Administration for Fiscal Years 2008 through 2011, generally at the requested levels. The bill does increase funding authorization for human factors, weather, unmanned aerial vehicles, the Joint Planning and Development Office, and environment research activities. In addition, the bill authorizes five new research programs, two of which are already being conducted by FAA.

The bill also makes several important improvements to the Joint Planning and Development Office (“JPDO”), which is housed within the FAA but serves to coordinate research among five federal departments and agencies, whose goal is to develop a new air traffic control system by the year 2025 that will triple the system’s current capacity. Section 4 clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the JPDO and its partner agencies, and clarifies accountability and budgeting.

Finally, I would like to emphasize one other feature of the bill that addresses unmanned aerial vehicles. Sec. 4 includes an extensive provision directing FAA to provide Congress with research plans and conduct pilot projects designed to accelerate the introduction of “UAVs” into the national airspace system in a safe and effective manner. There are a number of federal and state agencies that desire to use UAVs to perform public safety missions, especially with regard to border protection and drug interdiction. UAVs are being used to great effect by the Defense Department, and I believe, as does the Chairman, that UAVs can serve critical roles here at home.

I want to thank Mr. Udall and the majority staff for their open and frequent consultation throughout the entire development of this bill. Bi-partisanship has long been a hallmark of this committee, and this bill is certainly reflective of that tradition. I look forward to supporting this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.